



Security Council

Seventy-second year

7953rd meeting

Friday, 26 May 2017, 10.15 a.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mr. Bermúdez (Uruguay)

Members:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
China	Mr. Shen Bo
Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
France	Mr. Delattre
Italy	Mr. Lambertini
Japan	Mr. Bessho
Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
Senegal	Mr. Ciss
Sweden	Mr. Skau
Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland ..	Mr. Rycroft
United States of America	Mr. Klein

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. Mladenov is joining today's meeting via video-conference from Jerusalem.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give Mr. Mladenov the floor.

Mr. Mladenov: On the eve of the holy month of Ramadan, allow me to extend my warmest greetings to all our Muslims and wish them *Ramadan Kareem*.

This briefing unfortunately follows on the heels of the despicable terrorist attacks in Minya and in Manchester. I offer my deep condolences to the families of the victims and to the Governments and the people of Egypt and the United Kingdom. There is no justification for terror. On his recent visit to the Middle East, while United States President Trump pressed for a common approach to addressing the scourge of extremism and terrorism, he also made it very clear that resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is critical to combating this threat and to achieving peace in the region. I welcome his personal engagement and that of Arab, Israeli and Palestinian leaders to advance this goal. However, during the past month, the complex dynamics on the ground have been creating an explosive environment.

In Gaza, we are walking into another crisis with our eyes wide open. I am today warning the Security Council that unless urgent measures are taken to de-escalate, the crisis risks spiralling out of control, with devastating consequences for Palestinians and Israelis alike. Since Hamas established an administrative committee in March, a parallel institution to run Governmental affairs in Gaza, the intra-Palestinian political tug-of-war has led to a significant deterioration in relations between Fatah and Hamas. The result is a significant worsening

of the humanitarian crisis that risks exploding into another conflict, which can only begin to be resolved by compromise, the implementation of intra-Palestinian agreements and an ending of the closures.

In April, the Palestinian Government upheld its decision to reduce salary allowances to nearly 60,000 public sector employees in Gaza. While the Government needs to ensure its fiscal sustainability under increasingly difficult economic conditions, it is important that reforms or decisions to reduce expenditures be fairly distributed and made with consideration to the harsh conditions in Gaza.

Gaza is also in the midst of an unprecedented energy crisis. The power plant that supplies 30 per cent of Gaza's electricity stopped functioning on 16 April, due to a dispute between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas over taxation on fuel. The lines supplying power from Egypt into Gaza are often down for technical reasons. This leaves Israeli power lines, which provide some 60 per cent of Gaza's electricity, as the only reliable energy source. Meanwhile, the Palestinian Government has decided to cap its purchase of electricity from Israel for Gaza. If implemented, this decision would further reduce electricity supply to Gaza from Israel by some 30 per cent, plunging its population into a spiral of a humanitarian catastrophe.

Since April, the majority of Palestinians in Gaza have been receiving about four hours of electricity per day. How long do Council members think they can survive if this is further reduced to two hours of electricity per day? Who will pay the price of the ensuing violence and escalation? It will not be those who live a life of exemption and privilege. The price will be paid by poor Palestinians — by women and children, by people already traumatized by conflict, who have been held hostage for a decade now. They are the ones who will not have access to electricity, to water, to health services and sanitation.

No one has any interest in another conflict in Gaza. Everyone has a responsibility to avoid it. For months, the United Nations has warned that without addressing the structural problems of Gaza's electricity supply we would face a humanitarian crisis. Those warnings are now a reality. Let me illustrate to the Council what that reality looks like. Hospitals are now forced to postpone elective surgeries and have already reduced 80 per cent of cleaning, catering and sterilization services. Had it not been for the timely United Nations humanitarian

intervention on 27 April to provide emergency fuel for generators, some 51 surgical and obstetric operation theatres, five hemodialysis centres and a number of emergency departments would have had to close. Since mid-April, desalination plants have been functioning at 15 per cent of their capacity, and drinking water has been supplied for a few hours every two to four days.

As we speak 100,000 cubic metres of raw sewage are discharged into the Mediterranean Sea on a daily basis. This is the equivalent of 40 Olympic-size swimming pools of untreated sewage daily, which is an environmental disaster in the making for Israel, Egypt and Gaza.

Food prices are soaring as the price of water for irrigation has gone up by some 65 per cent. The manufacturing sector is grinding to a halt, and over half of private industry workers have been suspended. The United Nations is working determinedly to mitigate the humanitarian impact of this crisis. A United Nations-managed emergency fuel operation is delivering fuel to essential services for water, health and sanitation, but our reserves will run out in the coming weeks. It can only temporarily alleviate the suffering of the most vulnerable, but is no substitute for a sustainable solution.

Defusing the current energy crisis will require compromise on all sides, including tax concessions on fuel for the power plant and a profound reform of how energy is supplied in Gaza. The Palestinian Authority, Hamas — which has controlled Gaza for a decade — and Israel all have obligations for the welfare of Gaza's residents and must live up to their responsibilities to address the crisis and overcome its political impasse. Over the past weeks, I have engaged with the parties and our international partners not only to find a solution to the immediate electricity challenges, but also to address the broader political challenge of returning Gaza to the control of the legitimate Palestinian authorities.

With respect to another troubling development, allow me to join the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in condemning yesterday's executions of three men in Gaza, in contravention of international law. These executions bring to 28 the number of death sentences carried out since the Hamas takeover in 2007, with nine just in the past year.

Turning to the broader Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in recent weeks we have seen more tragic examples of the human toll that this conflict is inflicting, with six Palestinians killed in various acts of violence. I am

also very concerned by the ongoing hunger strike of Palestinian detainees protesting against their conditions in Israeli jails, which, on the eve of Ramadan, has now entered its fortieth day. According to reports, the Israeli prison service has evacuated at least 60 hunger-striking prisoners to hospitals because their medical condition had worsened, while another close to 600 prisoners have been moved to infirmaries set up in the prisons. Reports of punitive measures against the hunger strikers, including restricted access to lawyers and the denial of family visits, are alarming. The right of detainees to access a lawyer is a right that should never be curtailed.

I call for a redoubling of efforts to end the strike as soon as possible. The crisis must be resolved in line with international humanitarian law and Israel's human rights obligations. All actors should exercise maximum restraint and responsibility and take the necessary steps to avoid escalating tensions.

On 4 May, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians met in Brussels to discuss the key socioeconomic challenges faced by the Palestinian Authority. Regrettably, a number of key issues remain unresolved between the parties on access and movement, energy, water and fiscal sustainability. While many of the solutions are technical, ultimately the decisions to implement them are political. I am encouraged by the fact that in recent weeks, the Israeli and Palestinian Ministers of Finance have come together in an effort to move these issues forward. Their fruitful consultations, the first meeting of the Joint Water Committee in seven years and the progress in the implementation of last year's landmark electricity agreement are positive steps that need to be encouraged and supported.

I also take note of recently announced Israeli measures designed to help the Palestinian economy in the West Bank. These steps reportedly include the proposed zoning of land in Area C, adjacent to several Palestinian cities, for their residential, industrial and agricultural use; the development of industrial zones in Tarkumiya and Hebron; and expanding the hours of operation of the Allenby Bridge crossing. These are positive steps that will also need to be substantially expanded if they are to achieve the desired effect.

Before closing, let me turn very briefly to Lebanon and the Colan. Regrettably, the Lebanese Parliament has not yet reconvened following its one-month adjournment

of 12 April. Agreement on an electoral law remains elusive, less than a month before Parliament's tenure ends on 20 June. I continue to hope that negotiations can be finalized in time to avoid institutional instability and to allow for the holding of elections, in accordance with the Constitution.

In the Golan, the ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic has been maintained, albeit in a volatile environment attributable to the ongoing conflict in Syria and against the backdrop of continued military activity across the ceasefire line. This activity has included incidents of spillover and retaliatory fire, as well as Israeli air strikes in Syria targeting Hizbullah. Both Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic have stated their continued commitment to the separation of forces agreement and their support for the full return of United Nations Disengagement Observer Force to the area of separation, conditions permitting.

In closing, allow me to say a few words on efforts to advance the prospects for peace. As the conflict has ebbed and flowed, the key messages to both sides from the United Nations, including through its role in the Quartet and the broader international community, have remained clear, consistent and firm. Above all, Israel's almost 50-year occupation and settlement enterprise are untenable and must end through meaningful negotiations that address the final status issues. Their perpetuation is sending an unmistakable message to another generation of Palestinians that their dream of statehood is destined to remain just that — a dream — and to Israelis that their desire for peace, security and regional recognition also remains unattainable.

Still, much can and must be done. Israel can undertake transformative steps to improve the daily lives of Palestinians, to empower the Palestinian leadership and to move meaningfully towards a negotiated resolution of the conflict, in accordance with international law and Security Council resolutions. Palestinians, too, should heed the repeated calls to combat violence and incitement. Internally, they must also rise to the challenge of forging a genuine reconciliation, which is critical to advancing peace and fulfilling their national aspirations.

This summer will mark 10 years since Hamas' violent 2007 takeover of the Gaza Strip. The past decade has seen Gaza's infrastructure, its basic services and its private sector gradually debilitated, its economy weakened, with real gross domestic product

per capita and employment decreasing, and the gender gap continuing to grow. Gaza faces a downward spiral of de-development. The widening socioeconomic gap between Gaza and the West Bank further highlights the need to end the drivers of this inhumane and volatile situation. Deteriorating conditions only fuel anger and instability, strengthen extremists and undermine chances for a serious political process.

If Israelis and Palestinians hope to extract themselves from the immeasurable burden this conflict has wrought, they must be willing to take the painful steps that will ultimately lead to peace. Neither side can afford another missed opportunity.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Security Council who wish to take the floor.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we wish to express our solidarity with and condolences to our brothers and sisters in Egypt following the tragic criminal attack in that country. Our thoughts and our prayers are with the victims of this tragic terrorist act and the Government and the people of Egypt.

I thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his briefing. He has given us a very alarming picture of the situation in the region, especially in Gaza. We hope that this briefing will serve as a stimulus for the Security Council to meet its obligations in that regard.

The Plurinational State of Bolivia reaffirms its support for the self-determination of the Palestinian people and its right to a free, sovereign and independent State within the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

As always, we came to this meeting hoping to receive encouraging information about the situation of the Palestinian people and its legitimate aspirations to self-determination and the creation of an independent, sovereign State. We hoped that Israel, the occupying Power, would acknowledge the illegality of its colonizing activities and halt its construction of illegal settlement in the occupied Palestinian territories as a gesture of political goodwill in order to achieve the two-State solution. However, as on previous occasions, the reality is completely different from our expectation.

Once again, we must express our frustration over the fact that the situation remains essentially unchanged, or has even deteriorated, since the previous briefing in April (see S/PV.7929).

We are just a few days away from marking the fiftieth anniversary of the occupation by Israel of the Palestinian territories, which led to the adoption of resolution 242 (1967), of 22 November 1967, which expressly mentions, as one of the key principles for achieving peace in the Middle East, the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from the territories they have occupied during the conflict. Almost 50 years have passed since the adoption of that resolution, and Israeli forces continue to intimidate and terrorize the inhabitants of the occupied Palestinian territories. My Mission is struck by the fact that 50 years have passed, which is long enough for the international community to have been able to reach a definitive solution to the tragic situation of the Palestinian people.

In his most recent report, dated 13 April 2017 (A/HRC/34/70), the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 notes that the Israeli forces persist in carrying out actions that represent human rights violations, including the excessive use of force, forced displacements and restrictions on the free movement of the Palestinian people. The report also condemns the fact that as of late January 2017, a total of 105 demolitions had been recorded in Area C and 14 in East Jerusalem. It also states that in 2016 there were 1,093 demolitions in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the highest number recorded since the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs began collecting the data in 2009.

Unfortunately, despite the fact that on 23 December 2016 the Security Council adopted resolution 2334 (2016), which calls on Israel once again to put an end once and for all to all settlement activities in occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, the Government of Israel has done absolutely nothing to rectify its colonizing practices. Rather, in February, the Israeli Parliament passed the so-called regulation law, through which the occupying Power intended to retroactively legalize more than 5,500 settlements on lands belonging to Palestinians. The bill is still awaiting passage.

Bolivia calls on the Government of Israel to immediately cease all settlement activities and

related construction, as well as demolitions of Palestinian homes, especially when these are home to Palestinian families, as they represent grave acts of physical and psychological violence against the Palestinian population.

I would like also to draw the attention of the Council to the report of the mission that visited Palestine, as contained in its letter dated 24 May 2017, which sought to publicize the situation of the more than 1,500 Palestinian prisoners who as of today are on the fortieth day of their hunger strike, an extreme measure taken in order to achieve the release by the Government of Israel of more than 6,500 Palestinian prisoners and detainees. That measure has given rise to reprisals by the Israeli authorities.

Finally, we wish to reiterate our request that the quarterly report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) appear in writing, so that we can see a detailed report of the progress made, or the lack thereof, as well as current maps of all occupied Palestinian territories in which Israel has established settlements. Bolivia reaffirms its firm commitment to resolution 2334 (2016) and urges all Council members to pool their efforts to ensure its implementation without further delay. We believe that all resolutions adopted by the Council must be implemented with due rigor and commitment, with the single goal of ensuring international peace and security.

We highlight the importance of all contributions by the international community, including the steps taken by the United States of America, that would make it possible to achieve a peaceful solution to the situation of the Palestinian people.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Uruguay.

We thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his briefing and reiterate once again that Uruguay fully supports his work.

The Middle East region continues to be the epicentre of multiple armed conflicts, which are promoted by various causes and interests and by a multitude of stakeholders who participate in them in one way or another.

Despite the complexity of the current situations in Syria, Yemen and Iraq, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,

because of its duration and its spillover towards the rest of the region, remains the most prominent of all of the situations affecting the Middle East. For that reason, Uruguay reaffirms once again, as it has done unwaveringly since 1947, its unwavering support for the right of Israel and of Palestine to live in peace, within secure and recognized borders, in a framework of renewed cooperation, free from any threat or action that breaches the peace.

Over these past seven decades, while Israel has become consolidated as a fully modern State and a full Member of the Organization, Palestine continues to face serious difficulties in terms of its development, its international integration and the consolidation of its territory, which has led to grave consequences for its population and heightened tensions throughout the whole region.

Uruguay, together with almost all members of the international community, firmly strongly supports the solution of two independent States, convinced that it is the only option that will make it possible for Israel and Palestine to coexist peacefully.

We reiterate that there can be no just and lasting peace in the absence of a two-State solution, which in turn cannot become a reality if the parties do not create the conditions for a peaceful, negotiated and mutually satisfactory way out of the conflict that puts an end to all pending issues of this protracted conflict.

In this vein, we call on the parties to relaunch direct bilateral negotiations as quickly as possible, without preconditions, as an essential path to that goal. To that end, it is key to reverse the current trends on the ground identified in the most recent Quartet report; failing that, it will be extremely difficult for Palestine to consolidate itself as a State.

It is also imperative that the Israeli and Palestinian authorities comply in good faith with their obligations under international law and with the resolutions of the Council; send clear political signs aimed at breaking the vicious circle of mutual distrust; and refrain from adopting unilateral decisions that hinder dialogue. As we are far from seeing such signs, we urge the parties to carefully consider their next steps and prevent the most extremist sectors of their respective Governments from prevailing over those that are truly committed to peace.

The adoption of resolution 2334 (2016) barely five months ago was a clear demonstration of the

importance that the international community attaches to the peaceful, successful conclusion of this process. However, Israel from that point on intensified announcements of its continuing policy of establishing settlements on Palestinian territory, which violates the provisions of that resolution as well as those of resolution 242 (1967), which affirms the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force.

Furthermore, Uruguay reiterates its vigorous condemnation of the continued episodes of violence and terrorist attacks and expresses its complete rejection of the incitement to and glorification of such acts by the Palestinian authorities. There is no place for complicit silence on this front.

All of the aforementioned in no way helps to make progress towards peace and jeopardizes the possibility of reaching a two-State solution. Uruguay welcomes all international, regional and unilateral initiatives that would make it possible to move forward in the quest for solutions in the Middle East peace process, in order to achieve a peaceful, just, negotiated, lasting way out of the situation that, in accordance with international law, takes account of the legitimate aspirations of both parties. We are pleased at the stated intention of the President of the United States to work so as to finally achieve peace between Israel and Palestine. Such commitments will be fundamental to bringing the parties together and to achieving a two-State solution in which both States coexist in peace and security.

In conclusion, we reiterate to the key actors in this process that moderation is essential to avoid unilateral announcements and actions that may seriously harm the future of the peace negotiations and the two-State solution. At the political level, it is crucial to seek new channels for dialogue and to keep those channels open. We cherish the hope that some day, which we hope comes sooner rather than later, both parties will prioritize the immense potential of their region and move forward sustainably on the path of bilateral economic, historical and cultural cooperation. I reiterate that both parties have an enormous shared heritage. They can count on Uruguay to help strengthen this dialogue.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

The meeting rose at 10.40 a.m.